

67-250 Term Project
Equitare Business Plan

Executive Summary(Noah)

Equitare is a ride-sharing platform for university students heading to their local airport. It allows students to connect with others on similar flight schedules and split the cost of a ride to the airport. Equitare's features include but are not limited to: university email verification, scheduling tools, and built-in messaging. Equitare makes end of semester airport travel cheaper, safer, and easier for students.

Overview and Background(PUTT)

Mission Statement:

Equitare's mission is to empower university students at Carnegie Mellon University in their travels by making airport transportation more affordable, convenient, and community-driven. We aim to reduce travel stress, financial burden while maintaining reliability by connecting students through our share-ride platform based on their flight schedules and priorities.

Objectives:

- Short Term:
 - Launch Minimum Viable Product (Equitare webapp) beta version at Carnegie Mellon University for select beta-testers (end of semester)
 - User-testing for system with ~100 CMU students during pilot phase (during summer)
 - Gather feedback from user-testing and iterate based on user experiences using agile methods.
- Long Term:
 - Launch an official release version of Equitare at Carnegie Mellon University, open to public use by the end of next academic year.
 - Develop potential partnerships with rideshare companies (uber, etc.) and potentially with Carnegie Mellon University for funding
 - Monetize webapp through more channels (in-app advertisements and premium features).

Background: Equitare was inspired by personal experiences shared among CMU students when traveling from and to the Pittsburgh International Airport. Students currently have two options when traveling to the airport, taking the bus, and calling a ride using apps like Uber or Lyft. Each of these methods are general modes of transportation which each have their benefits and flaws. Most students find the bus inconvenient due to the lengthy travel times, as well as inconsistencies due to potential delays in bus times. Ride apps on the other hand captivate another section of potential users through their efficiency, and speed of travel, but dissuade

countless users due to high costs from \$40 - 60. Thus, we noticed the lack of a centralized, niche platform tailored to CMU students' needs, and envisioned a toll that would leverage this gap in the market, and provide a service students would take advantage of.

Product/Service: Equitare is an all-in-one airport transportation web-app platform that allows students to connect with peers and other students traveling to the Pittsburgh International Airport at similar times. It includes CMU email authentication and profiles for safety, scheduling pages and a matchmaking system for similar times, in-app messaging for ride-sharing, as well as cost-splitting features and filtering preferences.

Target Market: Carnegie Mellon university has a total student population of just over 14,500 students, and around 6,308 of them being international as of 2023. ([CMU](#)) This serves as our initial testing base/market size. Since this is a niche app which targets a small yet significant gap in the market, the product relies heavily on consecutive use of the application, and focusing during the peak times. Eventually, we will expand to a larger market, including all universities in the U.S. but only after initial launches/testing is successful at CMU.

Strategic Positioning:

We aim to position and market Equitare in a niche gap in the market, which emphasizes and takes pride in security measures through student-verification, as well as affordability, two crutches in the other transportation methods to the airport, the bus and ride apps. Our strategy also centers around university affiliation, and network effects.

Market Analysis(will)

Industry Analysis

Ride sharing apps are already big business in the United States, bringing in about US \$28.5 billion in 2024 (Aishwarya & Wadhwani 2024) . Analysts expect that total to grow roughly 7 percent a year on average, what experts call the compound annual growth rate (CAGR, simply the typical yearly increase), so the market could nearly double by 2034. One slice of that pie is rides to and from airports. That piece alone is forecast to rise from US \$24.7 billion today to nearly US \$39 billion in ten years (Airport Ground Transportation Market, 2024) . The reason: people are flying again. According to the International Trade Administration (2024), U.S. passenger numbers have bounced back to about 3 percent above pre-pandemic 2019 levels. College students are a natural fit for shared rides. Over half of Americans aged 18-29 were already using ride hailing in 2018 (Jiang, 2010) , and nearly every student now carries a smartphone. At break time they face the same problem: expensive solo trips or limited campus shuttles. Rising parking fees and climate goals also push campuses toward shared, greener travel. All of this signals an expanding market, and a clear pain point, for any service that can organise safe, low-cost airport carpools.

Competitive Analysis

Ride-sharing is dominated by Uber (roughly 76 % of U.S. consumer spend) and Lyft (~24 %) (Kaczmarek, 2024) . These giants deliver driver supply but impose steep surge pricing during peak/busy hours and cannot ensure riders pair/share with other fellow students. At Northwestern, the SPLIT form has paired 1,400 carpools, dropping a \$55 to 90 airport ride to roughly \$15 per person (Hou, 2023) . At the University of Southern California, the “Shairport” iOS app lets students at LAX (Los Angeles International Airport) find nearby students and split fares, often cutting the price in half (Palmore, 2023) . Earlier, Zimride proved a campus-only network could work before closing in 2020. Traditional shuttles, taxis and buses remain options but lack flexibility or door-to-door comfort.

Equitare’s competitive advantage is to also connect with fellow students, adding trust. Every user signs in with a .edu email, so riders know they’re with fellow students. The app lets you schedule a shared ride weeks ahead, chat with matches, and automatically split the cost—avoiding surge prices entirely. For universities, Equitare reduces traffic and supports sustainability goals, making partnership more likely than with generic apps. In short, mainstream services overlook this niche; Equitare is built for it.

SWOT Analysis:

Strengths – Equitare limits membership to “.edu” email holders, so every rider or driver is a verified student, recreating the trusted community that once made Zimride popular . Because the app pre-matches travellers and splits one fare, a typical \$55-\$90 solo airport Uber can drop to about \$15 each, as Northwestern’s SPLIT pilot showed .

Weaknesses – Like any new marketplace, it faces a problem, needing enough riders and drivers at the same time for matches to work).

Opportunities – U.S. airport ground-transport is forecast to jump from \$24.7 B in 2024 to \$38.7B by 2034 (Future Market Insights, 2024), and more than half of 18-29-year-olds already use ride-hailing .

Threats – Uber (~76 % share) and Lyft (~24 %) could copy the idea or undercut prices; substitutes abound, from Pittsburgh’s \$2.75 28X bus to catching a lift with a friend.

Porter’s Five Forces Analysis

New entrants – moderate: Equitare’s power low. Coding a similar app and flyering dorms is cheap, USC’s Shairport emerged exactly that way, so Equitare must spread to more campuses fast.

Buyer power (students) – high: Equitare’s power low. Switching takes one tap: if Equitare isn’t much cheaper or more convenient, riders jump to Uber, transit, or taxis.

Supplier power – moderate for both sides: Only with enough students enrolled to use the app will there be drivers on the platform.

Substitute threat – high: Equitare’s power low. Solo ride-hail, public buses, university shuttles, or carpools with friends all meet the same need.

Industry rivalry – moderate-high: Equitare’s power is moderate. The \$28.5 bus ride hail market is already a two-horse race, yet neither giant offers pre-booked, .edu-verified pooling, giving Equitare an advantage if it locks in campuses early.

Marketing and Sales Strategy(PUTT)

Marketing Strategy:

Given that Equitare’s target market are Carnegie Mellon Students, we plan to hold a campus-wide awareness campaign at CMU which includes:

- Social media marketing via Tiktok and Instagram Reels
- Flyers and Posters in high-traffic areas (dorms, libraries)
- Referral incentives (free ride credits for referring friends)

Pricing Model:

We plan for Equitare to be initially free to use for students, during the user testing phases, for the web-app to gain traction and increase the user base and expand through network effects. Then, after we reach 200-500 users for the application, we will start monetizing the webapp through in-app advertisements from local and travel-related businesses or other companies. Once we hit roughly 700 users, we will then deploy a freemium model, including premium features which would include priority matching and lower wait times for a small monthly fee. Potential partnerships that could arise with Uber or Lyft would increase funding as well in the future.

Operations Plan(NOAH)

Development Plan:

We plan to develop our service through web development, using ReactJS and Tailwind CSS for the front end and mongodb and expressJS for the back end. This is a popular tech stack called the MERN stack, which stands for MongoDB, ExpressJS, ReactJS, and NodeJs. The development process will follow an agile workflow, with iterative updates based on user feedback and testing from a pilot group of CMU students. Key features will include:

- College student email user verification
- Calendar-based ride scheduling interface
- In-app messaging for real-time communication
- Ride filtering and cost-splitting tools

Production Plan:

Our product does not require physical production, as our service is entirely digital and will be hosted on cloud infrastructure such as AWS. Since our service/website will be hosted on the internet, it will be provided to all college students with an available internet network. Initially, our plan is to exclusively distribute/target this service for CMU students as initial user testing, with hopes to eventually branch out into other colleges around the nation.

Supply Chain:

Since Equitare is a web-based service, our supply chain primarily consists of software tools and cloud services including:

- **GitHub** for collaboration
- **Figma** for UI design
- **Express** for server hosting
- **MongoDB Atlas** for database management
- **AWS** for website hosting

Facilities:

As a student-run startup, we do not require a separate physical space for work. Remote work will be the primary method of production. As students of CMU, we plan to use CMU's existing work facilities to maximize our productivity, such as the Hunt Library and Tepper Building meeting rooms.

Financial Plan (PUTT)

Revenue Model: Detailed explanation of how the startup will generate revenue.

Financial Projections: Include profit and loss forecasts, cash flow projections, and a break-even analysis for the next 3-5 years.

Revenue Models:

- **In-app Advertising:** Local businesses and online businesses through google ads
- **Premium Subscription:** Optional premium subscription for higher matching priority and exclusive features.
- **Affiliate Commissions:** Earnings from partnerships with Uber, Lyft, or the university funding.

Financial Projections:

1. In-App Advertising:
 - a. Revenue Assumptions:
 - i. Assuming low CPM rates for a new web-app, estimate \$0.50 CPM (cost per 1,000 impressions) ([Mobile Advertising Rates \(2025\) - Business of Apps](#))
 - ii. Assumption:

1. Each user sees ~20 ads/month
2. Premium Subscriptions:
 - a. Pricing: \$2.99/month or \$24.99/year
 - b. Features:
 - i. Priority ride matching
 - ii. Advanced ride filters (time priority, luggage space)
 - iii. Calendar sync
 - c. Assumption:
 - i. 15% of active users will use premium features
 - ii. Assuming yearly plan purchases (\$24.99)
3. Affiliate Commissions:
 - a. Assuming commission rates of \$2 per referred ride
 - b. Assumption:
 - i. 20% of users book a ride through affiliate link once per semester
 - ii. 2 rides/year

Total Revenue Calculations: **Revenue** = Rev. from Premium Subs + Rev. From In-App Ads + Rev. From Affiliate Commissions

Rev. from premium subscriptions:

= No. users * 0.15(premium ratio) * 24.99(assume \$25)

Rev. from in-app ads:

= (No. users * 20 ads/month * 12 months) * 0.0005(estimated CPM)

Rev. from Affiliate commissions:

= No. users * 2(estimated rides/year) * 20%(percent of affiliate rides)

Estimated Expenses:

Cloud Hosting (AWS) = \$2000

Database (MongoDB Atlas) = \$1000

Github + Figma Pro = \$400

Marketing Cost = \$1000 (Y2 onwards)

Legal filings = \$1000 (Y1 only)

Expected small operating expense increases = 10% increases annually

Year	Users	Premium Users	Revenue (\$)	Expenses (\$)	Net Profit (\$)
1	1,000	150	4270	4400	-130
2	2000	300	8540	4840	3700

3	5,000	750	21350	5324	16026
4	10,000	1,500	42700	5856	36844
5	15,000	2,250	64050	6442	57608

Conclusion

Equitare turns a universal student headache (expensive, unreliable airport trips) into a low-cost, community-driven experience. By leveraging .edu verification, automatic cost-splitting, and a proven freemium model, we slash travel costs while opening three scalable revenue streams.

We're seeking early partners and seed funding to finish pilot testing, refine the product, and launch campus-wide next year. Join us—whether as an investor, strategic partner, or mentor—and help every student fly smarter, together.

Presentation Script:

Elevator Pitch (1 min):

Putt: Imagine this: your flight's tomorrow, and you're staring down two bad choices—wait an hour for the 28X or pay \$50 for a solo Uber.

William: Neither fits a student budget or schedule. But what if the ride were faster and only \$15?

Noah: Meet Equitare, the CMU-built rideshare that checks every box.

Putt: We match CMU students with overlapping flight times, verify each rider with a campus email, and split the fare automatically—same Uber, one-third the cost.

William: Just enter your flight, pick a departure window, and Equitare shows other students on a similar schedule. One tap, one chat, ride confirmed.

Noah: We're reducing costs, maintaining travel efficiency, and fostering potential friendships within the community.

Putt: And we're not just solving a transportation problem, we're building a business: premium features for regular travelers, commissions through partnerships with affiliate ride apps like Uber and Lyft, and in-app advertisements keep us profitable long-term.

William: Market-wise, every suitcase-rolling student is a potential user, that's over 15,000 students at CMU alone.

Noah: Equitare—find your ride, together.

Putt: Here's a little bit on how the webapp works.

(Proceed to DEMO of app) - 4 minutes

Extra Information if time permits:

William: Here's how it works. Equitare connects CMU students who are flying out around the same time and lets them share a ride to the airport. All users are verified with their CMU email,

so you know you're riding with a fellow student. And best of all — you're splitting the cost. What was once a \$50 solo Uber ride could now be \$15–\$20 each when split between three students.

Noah: The platform is simple and intuitive. You input your flight time and choose a departure window, and Equitare shows you other students who match your schedule. You can message them directly in-app to coordinate, and once you confirm the ride, Equitare even helps you calculate how to fairly split the cost.

William: In terms of impact, we're building community, reducing financial barriers, and making travel safer and more affordable. As we grow, we'll expand to other universities and expand our user base through network effects.

Putt: And we're not just solving a transportation problem — we're building a business. Our model has three revenue streams:

1. Premium Subscriptions: users can unlock features like priority ride matching, calendar sync, and advanced filters. a
2. Affiliate Partnerships: We plan to earn a commission from ride services like Uber or airport shuttles when rides are booked through Equitare.
3. In-App Advertising: Local businesses and student services can advertise directly to CMU students through our platform.

Noah: Our marketing strategy is focused on campus-based growth. We'll run targeted promotions through social media like TikTok and Instagram. Think flyers in dorms and Instagram stories during finals week.

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